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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/C

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2019
TAGS: CM PGOV PHUM PREL
SUBJECT: CAMEROON'S PM SHRUGS OFF CRITICISM OF ELECAM

REF: YAOUNDE 72

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.4 (d) and (e)
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¶1. (C) On January 27, Ambassador met with Prime Minister Iphriam Inoni to discuss Cameroon's new Electoral Commission, Elections Cameroon (ELECAM). Ambassador clarified that unlike in her January 15 conversation with him (reftel), this time she was representing USG views and not coming in her capacity as the head of the 8 plus 6. After discussing ELECAM with a wide range of contacts from civil society, opposition and government, the Ambassador said it seemed clear that ELECAM does not have the trust of the Cameroonian people needed to run a credible election. As a result, she would not attend the swearing in of new ELECAM members scheduled for January 29.

¶2. (C) Inoni responded calmly that he respected the U.S. opinion and knew we were a good friend of Cameroon, adding "you have to do what you have to do." Ambassador pressed that the burden was now on the government to show that ELECAM can run a free and fair election and that, until this is done, we would not support ELECAM financially or in public remarks. Inoni said he understood and that "the government has a big job now," agreeing that the government needed to show that ELECAM can work and hoping that international partners would give the Electoral Commission a chance. He had seen a draft European Union statement on ELECAM which he said he frankly expected to be more forceful. Inoni proposed to chair a meeting with the 8 plus 6 Ambassadors and the Foreign Minister within the next few days to further discuss ELECAM.

¶3. (C) Comment: Inoni was surprisingly at ease with the U.S. opposition to ELECAM. He obviously feels bound to implement the President's selections for ELECAM but does not appear interested in defending them. His reaction suggests that a critical public statement about the ELECAM decision will win us heightened credibility with the Cameroonian public without overly damaging relations with the government, which has come to expect us to speak forcefully against government decisions that weaken democracy and good governance.
GARVEY